

Preprint version

Later published as Leadership Attributes and cultural values in Australia and New Zealand compared: An initial report based on GLOBE data. *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, **2**, 37-44.

Leading in Australia: Results from the GLOBE Study

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What is the nature of leadership in Australia? Is Australian leadership uniquely conditioned by our national culture? If this is the case, then how are Australian leaders different from their counterparts in other parts of the world? These are the questions that we sought to answer through participation in the 62-nation GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness program) project. The overarching aim of GLOBE, initiated and led since 1993 by Professor Robert J. House of the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania, was “to develop an empirically based theory to describe, to understand, and to predict the impact of specific cultural variables on leadership and organisational processes and the effectiveness of these processes”. This aim was to be accomplished through an examination the relationships between societal culture, organisational culture, and organisational leadership.¹

The first author of this article joined the project as “Australian Country Co-Investigator” (CCI) because of an existing interest in leadership, and a desire to understand in detail the elements of national culture that affect Australian leadership. In particular, participation as a GLOBE CCI enabled study of the attributes of effective and ineffective leadership that apply in the Australian context.² Such an understanding of culture would shed light on why we have had prime ministers of such diverse character as Bob Hawke,

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Robert Menzies and John Howard; and why we have business leaders as diverse in character as John Elliott, Rupert Murdoch, and Janet Holmes a Court. In short, the aim of participation in GLOBE was to understand the nature of effective leadership in the Australian cultural context.

The importance of the situation in which a leader leads has long been known to be crucial in determining how effective a leader will be³. In this respect, a great deal of attention has been placed on the micro level of leadership — the level of stress, focus on task or people; and the nature of the organisation itself. More recently, there has been recognition of the impact that culture has on a leader's perceived effectiveness. Increased globalisation and enhanced communication methods now mean that organisational leaders need the skills to manage a diverse workforce across multiple cultures. Even executives who operate in one country must take into account international trends on their business and understand the impact of their leadership style on employees from different cultures.

Leadership is defined in GLOBE as: “The ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members”. Within this definition, the GLOBE team set out to ascertain the extent to which specific leadership behaviours are *universally endorsed* across cultures or *culture-specific* within a given national culture. The results of the GLOBE project showed that universal dimensions of leadership that facilitate and impede leadership do exist across cultures, but that the behaviours by which effective leadership is actually manifested may differ from country to country.⁴ The culture-specific leader behaviours and

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attributes are derived in turn from implicit *Culturally-endorsed Leadership Theories* (CLTs) that underlie perceptions of what constitutes effective leadership behaviour.

Within the Australian context, leadership has been an on-going topic of interest, and has been analysed from many angles. For instance, in *Frontiers of Excellence*,⁵ an Australian follow up study to Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*⁶, the authors reported that Australian industry leaders espouse the belief that leadership is of critical importance, but that management education had failed to develop proactive leaders. A decade later, The *Karpin Report*⁷ suggested that Australia lacked effective leaders necessary to provide the country with a competitive edge in the global economy of the Twenty-first Century.

In order for Australia to compete successfully on the international front, its leaders need to leverage off the country's distinctive competencies. Michael Porter discusses this in the *Comparative Advantage of Nations* – that each nation will maximise its wealth if it uses its particular mix of resources and abilities.⁸ Likewise, leaders in Australia can maximise the returns from their subordinates by understanding the cultural forces that drive them and adapting their leadership style in response. In this article, we discuss the findings of the Australian leg of the GLOBE project as a means to facilitate this understanding.

Cultural Context

The fundamental concepts underlying the GLOBE Project are that effective leadership depends on both (1) universal principles of leadership, and (2) styles of leadership that are unique to the culture in which the leadership takes place. In this respect, each culture has an implicit theory of what constitutes effective leadership: its CLT. Therefore, to investigate the

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cultural milieu of each of the participating countries, the GLOBE project embodied quantitative, survey-based studies of societal and organisational culture in 62 countries. This was undertaken at two levels: (1) the *practices* or behaviours of a society expressed in terms of what takes place “as is”, and (2) the *values* of a society described in terms of what they ‘should be’. Examples of typical GLOBE survey items are: “The way to be successful in this society *is* to plan ahead” (as is) and “I believe that people who are successful *should* plan ahead” (should be). The results of the GLOBE surveys identified nine dimensions of culture. Respondents responded to the survey items using a 1-7 scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement, and 7 represented strong agreement. The score for Australia on “As Is” and “Should Be”, as well as the rank out of 62 countries, who participated in the study, is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**⁹

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Table 1: GLOBE Culture Scales

Cultural Dimension	Description	As Is		Should Be	
		Score ^a	Rank ^b	Score ^a	Rank ^b
Power Distance	The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.	4.74	53	2.78	25
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which a collective relies on social norms, rituals, and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events.	4.39	19	3.98	51
Humane Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others.	4.28	21	5.58	20
Collectivism I	The degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.	4.29	29	4.40	42
Collectivism II	The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organisations or families.	4.17	52	5.75	27
Assertiveness	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others.	4.28	22	3.81	25
Gender Egalitarianism	The degree to which a collective minimises gender inequality.	3.40	30	5.02	8
Future Orientation	The extent to which individuals engage in future-orientated behaviours such as delaying gratification, planning and investing in the future.	4.09	20	5.15	49
Performance Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.	4.36	16	5.89	38

Notes:

^a Scale range = 1 to 7

^b Number of countries = 62

In summary thus far, to understand how to lead and to manage effectively in Australia, we must first understand the Australian culture. Australia's score on the nine dimensions in Table 1 tell us of where Australia stands at the moment. Based on the ranking

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results, Australian culture was classified as lying within the “Anglo” (English-speaking) cluster of countries,¹⁰ and characterised by low power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, high humane orientation, low collectivism, high assertiveness, and a high future orientation. Australians especially value humane orientation and gender egalitarianism. It should be noted also that, as for most of the countries in the GLOBE study, there were some strong differences between the “As Is” and the “Should Be” results. Australians, for example, do not as a rule practice (“As Is”) Collectivism II (based on loyalty), although they do profess to value (“Should Be”) this cultural characteristic.

Australian culture, however, has developed over many years. Therefore, to appreciate what effective leadership means to the Australian people, there is first a need to understand Australia’s history and how our origins, activities and achievements contribute to our current culture and perception of leaders.

Australia’s cultural history is discussed in detail in Ashkanasy and Falkus’s chapter entitled *The Australian Enigma*,¹¹ forthcoming in the *GLOBE Anthology Book*¹². In brief, Ashkanasy and Falkus describe the development of cultural values in Australia since European settlement began in 1788. They describe in particular, the development of values of egalitarianism and individualism in Australian culture. Egalitarianism, they argue, derives from the earliest days of colonial administration when free settlers and freed convicts set out together to develop a vast and unforgiving land. Under these circumstances, there was no room for the traditional social divisions of European society. Also during this time, Australians developed a distain for bureaucracy and authority, and indeed for anyone perceived to be setting themselves apart from the norms of society. Eventually, these

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attitudes came to be manifested in the “tall-poppy syndrome”, a propensity for spontaneously criticising and cutting down high achievers.¹³ The need to work together under difficult circumstances, especially through participation in two World Wars, also led the Australian social phenomenon of “mateship”, where “mates”, often in the face of adversity, back each other up.

Ashkanasy and Falkus identified in particular a number of contradictions in the Australian psyche. For example: Australia is the most sparsely populated continent on earth bar Antarctica, yet has one of the most urbanised societies. Australia is physically removed from its UK heritage, but has maintained an essentially Anglo culture, distinct from its Asian neighbours. Australia is a multicultural society, yet has a history of racial and ethnic intolerance, including the “White Australia Policy” in place for the first half of the 20th Century. These contradictions form the basis of what Ashkanasy and Falkus term the *Australian Enigma*. Perhaps nowhere was this enigmatic character more evident than in the 1999 Republican debate, where Australians failed to resolve the incongruity of an independent nation having its Head of State located in another country.

The recurring themes that Ashkanasy and Falkus identified in Australian cultural history are egalitarianism and individualism. Egalitarianism, in particular, is based upon the belief that Australians are equal, despite their racial and cultural differences, although it can also be viewed as a recipe for mediocrity, including tall poppy syndrome. Overall, however, egalitarianism is a belief that there should be equality of access for all Australians. This is espoused in the slang term “fair go”, meaning that everyone should be given the same fair opportunity. For example, the belief that anyone can have their own home is very important

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to Australians. Australia's generous welfare system is also indicative of a people striving for equality.

In summary, egalitarianism appears to be one key to successful leadership in Australia. An effective leader in Australia must thus ensure that equality is maintained and nurtured while developing leaders are tomorrow. Successful Australian leaders are, for example, expected to engage socially with their subordinates, perhaps going out for a drink with them after work.

Australian GLOBE Leadership Results

In addition to the measures of cultural practices and values, the GLOBE study questionnaire included a list of leadership attributes. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each attribute impedes or facilitates leadership. Based on these questionnaire responses, the GLOBE Project team identified twenty-one leader attributes. A second-order factor analysis of these attributes subsequently produced six underlying dimensions of leadership: (1) Charismatic/Value Based, (2) Self-Protective, (3) Team Orientated, (4) Humane, (5) Participative, and (6) Autonomous leadership. Of these, the Charismatic/Value Based leadership dimension was found universally to facilitate leadership, while the Self-Protective leadership dimension was found universally to impede leadership. The endorsement of the remaining dimensions as either contributing to, or impeding leadership, varied between countries.

In addition to the 62-nation analysis of the GLOBE data, CCIs were at liberty to conduct their own analysis of country-specific data. The authors of this article, together with

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the New Zealand CCI, analysed the GLOBE leadership attributes in a comparative study of Australia and New Zealand, which is to be reported elsewhere.¹⁴ The aim of the comparative analysis was to identify dimensions of leadership unique to Australia and New Zealand and to test the universality of the Charismatic/Value Based and Self-Protective leadership dimensions. The results showed that leadership in Australia and New Zealand shares the same egalitarian base but differs in detail across the two nations. New Zealanders, for example, were found to place greater emphasis on the team than Australians. In this article, however, we deal we deal specifically with the results of the Australian data, where four dimensions of leadership emerged. These are shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, and discussed in the following paragraphs.

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Table 2: Dimensions of Australian Leadership

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>
Visionary	Facilitates a leader's effectiveness and represents a style of leadership that provides a vision and inspires followers in a manner which is tactful, diplomatic, yet decisive. These behaviours reflect the universally endorsed Charismatic/Value Based leadership dimension in Australia.
Narcissistic	Impedes a leader's effectiveness, representing an individualistic, self-centred leader who promotes him or herself over the team. This dimension is similar to the universal Self-Protective leadership dimension.
Egalitarianism	Unique Australian leadership style which facilitates a leader's effectiveness. It represents a style of leadership that is generous and compassionate while being group-orientated and focused on building a collaborative team. Other attributes include being honest, sincere, and modest.
Bureaucratic	Impedes a leader's effectiveness, representing a style that emphasises formality and follows established routines and procedures.

Factor 1: Visionary Leadership

This factor corresponds closely to the universal Charismatic/Value Based leadership dimension identified in the GLOBE study. The emergence of a uniquely defined dimension in the Australian data analysis suggests that, although the universal Charismatic/Value Based leadership is perceived to contribute to a leader's effectiveness, the behaviours that manifest this leadership style in Australia differ in some respects from the more general construct. This factor represents a style of leadership that provides vision and inspires followers in tactful, diplomatic, yet decisive manner.

Factor 2: Narcissistic Leadership

The second factor represents a leadership style that is individualistic and self-centred, but this dimension is perceived to *impede* a leader's effectiveness. It is similar to the Self-Protective leadership dimension identified in the GLOBE study as a universal impediment to

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effective leadership. Like Visionary leadership, however, this dimension differs in detail from its GLOBE equivalent. Nevertheless, and as was found in the GLOBE study to be true in every culture, leaders must not be seem to be narcissistic or self-centred.

Factor 3: Egalitarianism Leadership

This factor is a culture-specific style of leadership that parallels the mateship phenomenon identified by Ashkanasy and Falkus in the *Australian Enigma*. It encompasses an unselfish and collaborative regard of friends and workmates; and represents a style of leadership that is generous and compassionate whilst being group-orientated and focused on building a collaborative team. Such a leader needs to be honest, sincere, and modest. The mateship element is reflected in the emphasis on the team, integrity, and modesty

Factor 4: Bureaucratic Leadership

This factor is the second one perceived to impede the effectiveness of Australian leadership. It represents a style that emphasises formality and the need to follow established routines and patterns. Such a leadership style also includes an administration component, indicating the need to be organised and follow rules and procedures. This ineffective leadership style is also culture specific; it is consistent with observations about Australian individualism and attitudes to authority. For example, Bob Hawke, Australia's Prime Minister from 1983 to 1988, while widely popular, forged his own direction whilst ostensibly ignoring the sensitivities of his own political party.

In summary of the four dimensions identified in the analysis of the Australian GLOBE data, two are seen to facilitate leadership, and two to impede leadership. Visionary

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Leadership and Egalitarian Leadership are seen to facilitate effective leadership in Australia. Visionary leadership is representative of a universal dimension facilitative of leadership, identified in the wider GLOBE program, while Egalitarian Leadership is a manifestation of Australian cultural values. Narcissistic Leadership and Bureaucratic Leadership inhibit leadership effectiveness in Australia. Narcissistic Leadership is related to the GLOBE Self-Protective dimension of leadership, universally seen to impede leadership effectiveness. Finally, Bureaucratic Leadership is a uniquely Australian dimension of leadership, reflective of Australia's cultural history, and seen to be inconsistent with effective leadership.¹⁵

Australian Leadership in Practice

Effectively managing relationships with subordinates, peers and within teams is a key challenge for leaders. Even though we may live our whole life in one country's cultural context, it is important to take time to understand the nuances of the culture and what is perceived to constitute effective leadership. The GLOBE Project identified six leadership dimensions that either universally facilitate or impede effective leadership. It is, however, the particular behavioural manifestations of these dimensions that are important for managers in Australia to understand.

The first key to successful leadership in Australia, and indeed the rest of the world, is the delivery of the Visionary Leadership. In the Australian context, however, visionary leadership should not be accompanied by overt displays of charisma. Indeed, Ashkanasy and Falkus refer specifically in the *Australian Enigma* to the need for Australian leaders to be visionary without displaying too much charisma.¹⁶ Instead, Australian leaders must maintain a level of equality and be seen as "one of the boys". Thus, the second requirement for

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effective leadership in Australia is the need for Egalitarian Leadership, a uniquely Australian characteristic of leadership that focuses on the group and the concept of mateship. Such a leader must have a high level of integrity and be trustworthy and honest while all the time maintaining the egalitarian ethos. In summary, even though Australian leaders are expected to articulate a vision, they must still get things done in an egalitarian way.

In effect, the Australian visionary leader needs to be decisive and performance orientated and, while still ensuring the success of the team, and to lead as an inspirational, yet down-to-earth individual. These conclusions present a challenge for Australian leaders: to maintain a balance between achievement and the maintenance of equality; between leading and maintaining his or her role as a “mate”. An effective leader in Australia must be perceived as part of the group and not as leading from in front. A leader who is able to achieve this fine balance and is down to earth and diplomatic in their behaviours may avoid the being seen as a “tall poppy”.

On the other hand, and consistent with the general conclusions of the GLOBE study, Australian leaders must also strive to avoid styles of leadership that are seen to be ineffective. The first of these is Narcissistic Leadership, corresponding to the universal Self-Protective style to leadership identified as an impediment in GLOBE. The specific behaviours making up this dimension describe several attributes of ineffective leadership, including being self-centred, autocratic; and emphasising status, hierarchy, and procedures. Associated with this is a uniquely Australian impediment to effective leadership: Bureaucratic Leadership. This style of leadership emphasises rules and authority. The emergence of this factor supports the

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notion of individualism in Australia and an inherent dislike of rules and regulations that we discussed earlier.

In conclusion, and given that effective leadership is an essential ingredient of organisational success, the GLOBE study has identified styles of leadership that enhance and impede leadership universally, and in specific cultures. These enhancers and impediments, in turn, derive from culturally implicit theories of leadership. It is therefore important for Australian managers to understand both universal enhancers and inhibitors of leadership as well as those dimensions of leadership unique to the Australian culture. The GLOBE results reinforce the universal rule that a Visionary Leadership style contributes to a leader's effectiveness regardless of the culture, and add Egalitarian Leadership as an additional facet of effective leadership in Australia. On the other hand, Narcissistic and Bureaucratic Leadership inhibit leadership in Australia. The challenge for Australian leaders is to balance a visionary leadership style with egalitarianism.

¹ For more information see: House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Ruiz-Quintanilla, A., Dorfman, P.W., Javidan, & M., Dickson M. (1999) "Cultural Influences on Leadership and Organizations: Project GLOBE", in W. Mobley (Ed.), *Advances in Global Leadership*, vol. 1, Stamford, CN: JAI Press. In this article, we present results based on societal culture and leadership data only.

² The CCIs were responsible in each country for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, and for interpreting the quantitative results within the context of their culture.

³ Yukl, G. (1989) "Managerial Leadership: A review of theory and research", *Journal of Management*, vol 15, no. 2, 251-289.

⁴ See den Hartog, D.N., House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Dorfman, P.W., Ruiz-Quintana, A., and GLOBE Associates. (1999). Culture specific and cross-culturally generalizable implicit leadership theories: Are attributes of charismatic/transformational leadership universally endorsed? *Leadership Quarterly*, vol 10, no. 2, 219-256.

⁵ Limerick, D., Cunningham, B., & Trevor-Roberts, B. (1985) *Frontiers of Excellence: A study of strategy, structure and culture in fifty Australian organisations*", Brisbane: Australian Institute of Management, Queensland Division.

⁶ Peter, T.J., & Waterman R.H. (1982) *In Search of Excellence – Lessons from America's Best-run Companies*. New York: Harper & Row.

⁷ Karpin, D. (1995) *Enterprising Nation: Renewing Australia's Managers to meet the Challenges of the Asia-Pacific Century*, Report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, April, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.

⁸ Porter, M.E. (1990). *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. London: McMillan.

⁹ Australian respondents comprised 344 middle-level managers in the telecommunications and financial sectors. They were employed in 15 different companies.

¹⁰ The authors of the present article are also preparing a paper based on GLOBE on for a forthcoming Special Issue of the *Journal of World Business*, and describing the characteristics of the “Anglo” group of cultures.

¹¹ Ashkanasy, N.M., & Falkus, S. (1997) “The Australian Enigma”, in House, R. M. (Ed.). *Cultures, Leadership, and Organizations: GLOBE – Country Anthologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

¹² The GLOBE Anthology comprises in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies of a subset of the countries in the GLOBE Project. It complements the principal GLOBE publication: House, R. M., Hanges, P.J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., Gupta, V., and GLOBE Associates. (Forthcoming, 2002). *Cultures, Leadership, and Organizations: Cultures, Leadership, and Organizations: GLOBE – a 62 Nation Study*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

¹³ Australian researcher Normal Feather is the world’s leading authority on the tall poppy syndrome. See Feather, N. T. (1994). Attitudes toward high achievers and reactions to their fall: Theory and research concerning tall poppies. In Zanna, M P. (Ed.). *Advances in social psychology*, vol. 26, pp. 1-73. New York: Academic Press.

¹⁴ Trevor-Roberts, E., Ashkanasy, N.M., & Kennedy, J. (2001) *The Egalitarian Leader: Leadership in Australia and New Zealand*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

¹⁵ For a comparison of Australian leadership characteristics in terms of the overall GLOBE second-order leadership dimensions, see den Hartog et al., *op cit*.

¹⁶ See Ashkanasy and Falkus, *op cit.*